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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: USAID/DART NORTHERN IRAQ UPDATE

SUMMARY

1. There has been no new influx of IDPs in northern Iraq since Iraq closed and mined the roads from the South. The ICRC confirmed that movements in the Kurdish-controlled areas were small compared to recent media reports. On 24 March MCI reported that people have begun returning to Sulaimaniyah from their temporary settlements in the hills. According to UNICEF, there are now reported to be 250,000 to 280,000 IDPs in the north, and the authorities and aid agencies in northern Iraq are prepared for new displacements. End Summary.

NORTHERN IRAQ - POPULATION DISPLACEMENTS

1. The DART continues to gather information on the situation in the Kurdish-controlled region of northern Iraq. Since the Government of Iraq closed and mined roads leading to this region from the South, there has been no new influx of displaced persons. Populations in the area have moved away from frontline communities, and some people are leaving and returning to their communities based on changes in security reports. The major concern of people in the region is the Turkish military.

2. On 24 March, DART met with a representative from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). ICRC is distributing medical supplies and a small number of tents to local authorities in the north for emergency needs. ICRC is targeting prisoners of war, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and the sick and wounded.

3. The ICRC delegate confirmed that movements in the Kurdish-controlled areas were small compared to recent media reports. He referred to "accordion"-like movements, with people moving from their homes to traditional villages or small camps and then returning to towns and cities, depending on their interpretation of the security situation.

4. UNICEF's Northern Iraq Field Representative provided more current information on population movements in northern Iraq to the DART. According to UNICEF, the number of IDPs swelled in the days following the onset of the conflict, to as many as 600,000, but there was very little traffic toward the Turkish or Iranian borders. Within days the displaced returned to their homes. There are now reported to be 250,000 to 280,000 IDPs in the north.

5. UNICEF also reported that authorities and aid agencies in northern Iraq are prepared for new displacements. Eighteen campsites have been identified, and public buildings have been identified as collective centers if necessary. UNICEF stocks have been moved to safe areas.

6. On 24 March, Mercy Corps International (MCI) reported that people have begun returning to Sulaimaniyah from their temporary settlements in the hills. He said that shops and markets in the city are reopening. MCI also stated that there was some concern about IDPs from Dohuk reportedly living in inadequate conditions exposed to the elements. More current information from Dohuk indicates that some people have now returned to their homes but their close proximity to Mosul, and the Turks, remains a concern.

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